



**PhD DISSERTATION**

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**THE USE OF INFORMATION DATABASES AND INTERNET  
IN PUBLIC LIBRARY REFERENCE IN SLOVENIA**

**Theses of the dissertation**

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## **THE USE OF INFORMATION DATABASES AND INTERNET IN PUBLIC LIBRARY REFERENCE IN SLOVENIA**

### **Topic selection**

In Slovenia, the country with 2 million inhabitants, favoured by the possibilities provided by the information society, global changes have taken place in traditional library activities and services during the years following the turn of the millennium, and this process has been still going on nowadays. In my dissertation I examine the online services of the public libraries provided directly via the Internet, independent from the opening hours of the institution.

My dissertation focuses on the following three main issues:

- functional conditions of the Slovenian public libraries,
- the national co-operative online library database,
- quality content providing of public library homepages.

### **The aim of the research**

The main goal of the research is to survey, describe and evaluate the characteristics of the Slovenian public library network, advantages and disadvantages of the national public library database, and its possibilities of development home and abroad. The main point of the

dissertation was set to surveying the public library homepages - in harmony with the principles of quality content providing I searched the answer to the following questions:

- Does the library provide independent information search within the possibilities of the Internet?
- In what form and to what extent can electronic publications be used via library homepages?
- Does the library have databases and collections developed on its own?

#### Research methods

1. Elaboration and analysis of the domestic and foreign scientific literature of the chosen topic
2. Examination of the laws, statutes, recommendations relating to the subject
3. Survey of homepages, evaluation and comparison of the results
4. Statistical reports and evaluations

#### The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into four chapters; in the introduction I shortly outline the topic defined in the title, the hypotheses connected with it, and I introduce the examined country.

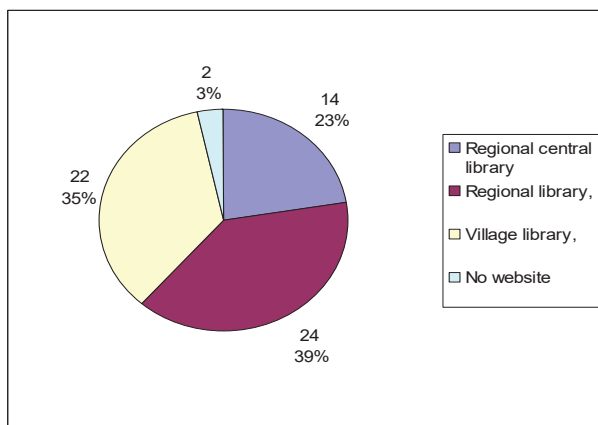
1. I shortly describe the laws and regulations relating to Slovenian library and public library activity regarding the period between 1945 and 2001. I emphasize the valid law issued in 2001, and all the public library norms and statutes concerning the institutions working within the frame of the public library network.
2. I briefly introduce the national academic Internet provider, which provides free Internet access to cultural, educational institutions, and non-profit organizations.
3. I fully describe the COBISS co-operative library database, the modules of the COBISS 2 and COBISS 3 programs used during public library activity, the CONOR authority database, the SICRIS research database and the other library computer services connected with it. As an outlook in this chapter I fully describe the COBISS.NET library database extended to four additional countries.
4. During the EU-measure-based examination of the Slovenian public library homepages from the aspects of content, structure, quality and operation I dwelled on the basic principles of editing library homepages. Within the frame of a questionnaire including 73 questions I surveyed and examined the services accessible on all the 60 public library homepages, and their quality. I revealed and evaluated the results of the survey

based on scoring system and expressed in percentage, projected separately to the three groups of the Slovenian public libraries. I ranked the results summarized in four tables, then I compared the results of surveying the Slovenian public library homepages with the results of surveying five Croatian and five Serbian public library homepages.

At the end of the dissertation I summarized the quality of these services of the public libraries, and I threw light on all the advantages and defects that were provable during the period examined, between 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2005 and 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2008.

The characteristics of the Slovenian public libraries from the aspect of the research According to size and the numerical ratio of the inhabitants of the library network I divided the 60 Slovenian public libraries into three groups, and the survey and examination were conducted based on these.

CATEGOR Y	LIBRARY	INHABITANTS	NUMBER
I.	Regional central library	50,000-100,000	14
II.	Regional library	20,000-50,000	24
III.	Village library	7,000-20,000	22



**60 out of 62 public libraries had their own homepages during the research period**

## RESULTS OF THE SLOVENIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY SURVEY

There were 62 public libraries listed in the register of the national methodological institute of the Ministry of Culture and the National and University Library of Ljubljana during the period examined. 60 public libraries out of them had permanent, working homepage on the Internet.

The names of the places with regional central libraries are marked in bold type for better lucidity. In case of the regional and village libraries I used light-faced type. With respect to the size and the format of the theses in this case I publish only the results of the twenty most successful public libraries<sup>1</sup>.

	Seat of the library	Score	Minus points	Total points	Average %
1.	<b>Ljubljana, O. Župančič</b>	60	0	60	82.2
2.	<b>Maribor</b>	57	0	57	78.1
3.	<b>Murska Sobota</b>	50	0	50	68.5
4-5.	Lendva	49	0	49	67.1
4-5.	<b>Koper</b>	49	0	49	67.1
6.	Kamnik	47	0	47	64.4
7-8.	<b>Novo mesto</b>	46	0	46	63.0
7-8.	<b>Ptuj</b>	47	1	46	63.0
9.	<b>Kranj</b>	46	1	45	61.6
10-11.	Brežice	44	0	44	60.3
10-11.	<b>Ljubljana, J. Mazovc</b>	45	1	44	60.3
12-14.	Trebnje	43	0	43	58.9
12-14.	<b>Ljubljana, Šiška</b>	43	0	43	58.9
12-14.	<b>Celje</b>	44	1	43	58.9
15-16.	Tržič	42	0	42	57.5

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<sup>1</sup> The results of all the 60 public library homepages participating in the survey can be found on page 149-150 of the dissertation.

15-16.	Tolmin	42	0	42	57.5
17-18.	Zagorje ob Savi	41	0	41	56.2
17-18.	<b>Ravne na Koroškem</b>	41	0	41	56.2
19-20.	Krško	40	0	40	54.8
19-20.	Velenje	40	0	40	54.8
21-60.	Other public libraries...	...	...	...	...
	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>35.8</b>		<b>35.6</b>	<b>48.7</b>

According to the criteria described in the survey, the Oton Župančič library of Ljubljana (82.2%), the Maribor Public Library (78.1%), and the Regional and Study Library of Murska Sobota (68.5%) live up to expectations. These are followed by the regional library of Lendava and the regional library of Koper (67.1%). The regional library of Kamnik was placed sixth (64%), followed by the library of Nove mesto and Ptuj (63%) at the seventh and eighth place. The Kranj library was placed ninth (61.6%), and the tenth and eleventh places were taken by the library of Brežice and the Jože Mazovc library of Ljubljana (60.3%) etc. The libraries could score 71 positive and 2 negative points with the 73 questions of the survey. Summarizing the positive and negative points of the 60 libraries participating in the survey, the average result was 35.6 points, 48.9%. Relying upon these findings we can prove that the Slovenian public library homepages did not meet the requirements fully from content and qualitative point of view during the period examined. The average result of the survey did not reach the minimum of 50%. During the qualitative examination of the EU cultural homepages **at least 70-75% result is recommended as acceptable criterion in each group of questions**. Setting out from this, the public library homepages of the three countries examined do not fully comply with these requirements and respects.

## THE AVERAGE RESULTS OF THE SLOVENIAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THE 5-5 CROATIAN AND SERBIAN LIBRARIES CHOSEN AS SAMPLES

By countries	Score	Minus points	Total points	Average %
Public libraries of Croatia	38.4	0.2	38.2	52.3
Public libraries of Slovenia	35.8	0.2	35.6	48.7
Public libraries of Serbia	31.8	0.0	31.8	43.5
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>35.3</b>		<b>35.1</b>	<b>48.2</b>

Comparing the results of the 60 Slovenian public libraries to the 5-5 Croatian and Serbian public libraries chosen as samples we can find that public libraries of Croatia scored 38.4 points, and with 52.5% they were placed first. The average result of the public libraries of the three countries examined was 48.2%, which almost fully corresponds to the average of the Slovenian public libraries.

## THE EXAMINATION OF THE HYPOTHESES

### 1.

**The continuous operating of the co-operative online library database gives everyone the opportunity to using the national bibliographic system via the Internet, free of charge, together with the electronic reference services of the public libraries provided to every user. The complexity of the library and reference system formed in Slovenia motivates the public libraries to provide information about their own collections and national literature covered in the COBISS database also beyond the library opening hours.**

The COBISS co-operative online library database can be accessed and used not only via given library computer terminals, but also via Internet, from outside the library building easily and barrier-free since the middle of the nineties. Without prior registration and identifying password via fast Internet transmission network everyone can use the co-operative Slovenian online database free of charge, which was installed within the frame of the IZUM in Maribor on a fast server of huge storage capacity. The central database and the local databases of the cooperating member libraries within the frame of the system can be used for information search and downloading data. Parallel with this the virtual library database of Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina can be accessed and browsed within the

COBISS.NET. The cataloguing librarians with access right to the database can download bibliographic records according to necessity.

The COBISS library program provides all-round services: it keeps the patron data and documents checked out on file, these can be renewed online, placing hold and interlibrary loan is also possible. Bibliography can also be compiled based on personal name, subject heading and UDC. The SICRIS research database, the CONOR cataster of names and the "Ask the Librarian" online service were developed within the frame of the institute operating the online database. Operating the library database in a system, its updating, and continuous training of the librarians are organized within the frame of the IZUM of Maribor. Based on the hypothesis above I justly can conclude that this comprehensive nationwide library database serve as a worthy example for the library systems of other countries.

Among the deficiencies of the database I stated, that it can not be called a wholly digital library, because it operates only as an electronic catalogue and database. The graphic interface of the cataloguing program was finished in 2004, but looking at the cover of the document chosen in a picture format or reading its short summary and table of contents as text is not yet possible. In 2005 some steps have been taken that could be called interim solutions. The notes field of the bibliographic record includes the web availability of the document on the given library server, which information can be viewed and downloaded in HTML or PDF format.

2.

**A quality public library homepage provides up-to-date information in a language clear to all, considering the needs and expectations of the users, with special respect to the national minorities and multilingualism. While planning the research I assumed, that the practice of libraries in the regions of minorities is licit, knowing the minority law assurance of the Slovenian constitution considered exemplary in Europe. The national endeavour respecting multicultural principles, I assume, results in the practice of information supply manifested in multilingualism in the public libraries.**

A public library homepage is naturally expected to present the institute itself, its collection and ongoing activities in a proper language and way to the target audience. This all must be composed in a language that is clear to all age-groups. The Slovenian public libraries met this measurement of my thesis entirely. Another important expectation is that the information provided to users must be fresh and up-to-date. Information that concerns outdated events must be stored among the archive materials. More than three-quarters of the libraries provide fresh information continuously, what allows us to come to the conclusion that the homepages are being refreshed continuously; invitations and reports on events and programs connected to



earlier dates are being modified or cancelled. We can not state that every library is able to meet these expectations. In the survey I found outdated information in more than 18% of the public library homepages examined.

I came to the conclusion that certain libraries are unwilling to promote events connected to a date in advance, because it is beyond their power to refresh their homepages daily and weekly. This points to the fact, that in the given institution there is no employee who could maintain the homepage of the library continuously.

Originating in the constitutional rights of the national minorities, the library act of 2001 guarantees in separate paragraphs the library supply of the minorities, including using the languages of nationalities within the frame of library activities. The libraries of Murska Sobota and Lendva fulfil these expectations concerning using the Hungarian language exemplarily. For decades both institutions have been employing librarians with a university education, whose mother tongue is Hungarian. Both library homepages are available in both languages. On both homepages we can find continuously refreshed and enriched content providing and reference forms in Hungarian.

In case of the coastal Italian nationality and the libraries of the bilingual region there, on the homepages of the regional library of Koper and the libraries of Piran and Sežana we can find exemplary Italian language reference and content providing. On the contrary, during the period examined in case of the library of Izola in the bilingual region, and the libraries of Nova Gorica and Ajdovščina at the Italian border this can be missed. On the basis of the principles of multilingualism and the necessity of the European Union compatible library homepages the public libraries of Slovenia fell rather behind in these endeavours. Upon the whole, out of the 60 library homepages examined I found shorter or longer English language summary and guide in only ten cases (16.7%). German language, so to say, fell into the background totally. Out of the frontier libraries only one has an informative homepage in German. None of the Slovenian public libraries situated in the south-eastern frontier region published additional contents in Croatian. The situation was not better in case of the Croatian and Serb libraries examined in the control group, either. Out of the Croatian libraries only the library of Rovinj has a homepage in Italian, while in case of the Serb libraries we can emphasize the Serb and English language homepage of the library of Čačak, and the Serb and Hungarian homepage of the city library of Sombor with rich content.

### 3.

**A modern public library can function as a traditional library and it is at the same time an information centre. It provides informative and continuously enriched services via**

**the Internet, that are up to the EU standards recommended to cultural institutions, among them to public libraries, and fulfil the expectations and needs of the users. In my empirical research I was trying to find out, to what extent do the homepages of the Slovenian public libraries meet the measurements of the handbook of quality principles. According to my presupposition there is considerable lag in this field.**

The quick development of the information technology and the demands made on the libraries challenge the representatives of the profession increasingly. Besides the traditional library services more and more attention must be paid to the information activities, since user demands and the expectations of communities and individuals are changing continuously. New services and forms of services appear, and library activity constantly changes and alters. The Slovenian public libraries have been striving for years to work not only as traditional libraries, but also as information centres. I can reinforce the statement outlined in my hypothesis by the results of the library homepage survey:

- 60 out of the 62 public libraries operate library homepage continuously,
- contacts to the library can be found on every opening homepage,
- 90% of the homepages have adequate, informative contents,
- 88.3% of the homepages meet the claims of all age groups of the target audience,
- the potential of online contacting and expressing opinion is very high (91.7%).

The OPAC of the co-operative library database is unfortunately not available directly at the opening page of the homepages of every library.

Unfortunately there is no direct access to the OPAC of the co-operative library database on the opening page of every library's homepage. It was made available only in 46 out of 60 libraries, what is barely 76%. The tendency is similar in case of the guide to the library's holdings, while various library services and their tariffs are outlined in 53 libraries (88.3%). 33 libraries publish a longer or shorter guide to the collection of the children's library, but only 28 libraries (46.75%) have a homepage particularly for children with rich illustrations and adequate contents. The collection of non-traditional library documents is presented by half of the institutions (31 libraries - 51.7%), while the local collection is presented only by 26 institutions (43.3%).

According to that, the public libraries examined do not fully comply with the expectations outlined in my hypothesis. Considering the IFLA norms concerning the public libraries, the Slovenian library law, the system of norms regarding the public libraries, accordingly, I come to the conclusion that year by year there is growing demand and need for the continuous

modernization of the services not only among the librarians, but also among the large group of users, including all age-groups, people living with various specialities, the majority of the nation, and the minority and ethnic groups. It is hard to be realized within a short time considering the present financing conditions, and the number of librarians employed permanently. It takes the Slovenian public libraries presumably 2-3 years to make up the lag in continuous financing, and assuring adequate professionals and technological equipment. The other solution seems to be drastic: raising the membership and service fees, fusing service sites and services, rearranging labour force, or staff work force reduction; introducing various economy measures like shorter opening hours, purchasing less documents, further use and amortization of the existing library equipment and technology. In this case the library will lose its authenticity and mission, and will not meet the expectations of the IFLA and the EU regarding public libraries.

#### 4.

**The digital content providing of the public library homepages gives everyone the opportunity to use all the databases, virtual libraries, digital lexicons, dictionaries, e-bibliographies and thematic link collections supplied by the institutions, by the help of Internet browsers and search engines, besides the traditional library services, independent from the opening hours, without constraints. According to my hypothesis, the libraries have recognized this necessity, but the launching date of the homepages and the navigation structure show the advantage of larger collections.**

The library is the mine of knowledge and information – all the libraries that supply continuous information- and content providing via Internet based on searches strive to prove this statement. Examining the question from a practical point of view, and prior to proving the statement drafted in the hypothesis I wanted to find out, how widely held and used national and international search engines, and search engines within the homepages are on Slovenian public library homepages. Unfortunately we have to state that the domestically developed and very popular Najdi.si and Matkurja search engines were available only in 25 (41.7%) out of the 60 public library homepages. The situation was not any better in case of foreign search engines either; Google, Altavista, Yahoo, Lycos and the others were available as direct links only on 24 library homepages (40%). Internal search program or tool could be found in case of only 16 libraries (26.7%). We can come to the conclusion that various search engines are available only in those libraries, that maintain rich homepage of high level, and that besides

minimal Internet services provide such contents and links, that lure their visitors back, who wish to set the library homepage as their default start page.

Digital text-collections, studies and e-bibliographies could be found in 16 libraries (26.7%), digital library was available in 13 institutions (21.7%). 20 libraries (33.3%) have direct links to the Slovenian Digital Library, maintained within the frames of the National and University Library of Slovenia. The online service called “Ask the librarian” is described in half of the libraries, and they also provide direct access link to it.

The Slovenian public libraries can not meet the expectations drafted in my hypothesis.

According to the data resulting from the survey timely, multi-purpose and continuous content providing, special databases, digital lexicons and thematic link collections can be maintained only in those larger, regional central and central libraries, where besides the traditional library services it was possible to employ additional staff with proper qualifications. From a global point of view the Slovenian public libraries fell much behind the neighbouring countries in digital content providing due to the unregulated copyright conditions, lack of financial support and educated staff.

## **SUMMARY**

Summarizing this all I can conclude that the co-operative database of Slovenian public libraries is exemplary to the library systems of the other European countries, while it is behind with digitizing full-text documents. One of the main reasons of this is the unregulated state of copyright issues of electronic publications. The results received by examining the public library homepages from the aspect of content, quality and structure prove that the larger part of the public libraries of Slovenia can not keep step fully with the rapid progress of computer and webtechnology partly in absence of funds and professionals.

## **PERSONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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